NEWS

State grant will assess energy efficiency of Winchester's West Side Fire Station

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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The West Side Fire Station will undergo an energy audit, thanks to a state grant. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Winchester is taking another step in meeting the goals set forth i
Climate Action Plan.

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The town recently received a $15,000 Municipal Energy Technical Assistance grant from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources for an American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) Level 2 audit of the West Side Fire Station at 45 Lockland Road.

Sustainability Director Ken Pruitt said the audit is essentially a structural building assessment following ASHRAE guidelines to determine its energy efficiency.

The West Side Fire Station is a two-engine station, approximately 3,264 square feet with two bays and living quarters for the staff.

Pruitt said the living quarters are heated and cooled by a heat pump while the rest of the building depends on oil. According to the grant/project summary, the station was built in 1976 and its boiler was replaced in 2004.

In fiscal year 2024, the station used approximately 1,880 gallons of oil and 19,370 kilowatts of electricity, the summary continued.

Pruitt said Winchester's Climate Action Plan calls for the reduction of 80% of the town's carbon pollution by 2050. And aiming to get rid of oil usage across the town is imperative to that mission.

The West Side Fire Station is one of the only town-owned facilities that still uses oil for heating and cooling. And, it has yet to have an audit.

"We're interested in having all the town buildings looked at for energy efficiency," Pruitt said, of why the station was picked for the assessment. "That will reduce the cost to the town as well as reduce carbon emissions."

Pruitt added oil is both expensive and highly polluting.

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The grant summary adds that by removing the boiler, the town could save approximately $7,000 each year if you take into consideration the average oil usage of 1,880 gallons at an estimated average price of $3.83 per gallon.

Additionally, emissions reduction would be approximately 19.3 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

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The audit

Pruitt said he filed for the grant on March 6, 2025 and received word back quickly that Winchester had received the max $15,000 which is annually awarded. He said Winchester has until June 30, 2026 to use the grant, but estimated the audit will be finished by the end of this year.

But what will the audit focus on?

In the grant summary, the ASHRAE audit will focus on the following:

• Identify opportunities for Energy Conservation Measures

• Identify opportunities for electrification to prioritize building electrification energy measures in pursuit of Winchester's and the Commonwealth's carbon neutrality goals

• Assess the current 2004 boiler and explore options for replacement. The town is looking to decarbonize the West Side fire station and remove the dependency on fossil fuels.

• Projected cost analysis.

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Because the grant is under $100,000, the state's procurement rules call for Winchester to obtain three written quotes on the project. Pruitt said once the quotes are in, he will work with Winchester's facilities manager Peter Lawson and Fire Chief Steve Osborne in looking at the recommendations.

What does all this mean?

Pruitt said the audit could provide many options and there will be many price tags associated with those options.

"It's even possible the experts might conduct the audit and we can't afford it," he said.

He added fire stations are generally difficult to fully electrify. Because heat pumps normally push warm air and warm water, it's difficult to keep the bays warm when the doors are constantly going up and down as fire engines go out.

"It's basically like having a wall go up and down all day," Pruitt said. "It may be the case, and I wouldn't be surprised, that there are solutions for everything except the bays and the project would still be worth doing."

Pruitt said the final audit will be incredibly detailed, but will only be the first step for the town. He said it should be non-disruptive and minimally invasive to the Fire Department staff.

What's next?

Winchester has been a leader in climate action, with its current plan setting out specific goals for 2050. However, Pruitt said there's a lot more money out there for communities that work towards committing to a net zero carbon reduction policy.

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"If we reduce from 80% to 100% by 2050, we could get $1 million every three years," Pruitt said. "And there are other grants available on top of that."

But right now, Winchester is concentrating on the West Side Fire Station.

"This audit is a small grant for a small building and it's fully in line with achieving the town's goals in its Climate Action Plan," Pruitt said. "But we still have to look at all the town's buildings."

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his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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